

**Chancellor's Community Forum**  
**5 Year Plan**  
**October 29, 2008**  
**Francis-Stevens EC**  
**6:30 pm – 8:00 pm**  
**Shereen Williams**

*The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.*

**Overview:** Most of the conversation centered around the need to hold students, schools, and the District measurably accountable for increasing academic achievement while simultaneously avoiding a school system based on “teaching to the test.” Several community members expressed the feeling that teachers are being constricted by the sole focus on reading and math, and many felt the scripted curriculum added to the loss of enthusiasm and creativity of teachers. They felt that teachers would be able to come up with more creative, engaging lessons if they focused on teaching the standards, rather than being tied to the curriculum.

However, many community members also felt that DCPS needs to continue its recent focus on data-driven instruction. One community member lamented the lack of specific targets in the '09 plan and 5 year plan for increases in graduation rates, truancy reduction, and test scores. Another community member emphasized the need to further align the standardized tests to the standards and curriculum being taught. The community member said the alignment was “better, but not quite there.”

Finally, several community members wanted a better focus and plan of action targeting parent involvement in schools and students' academics. One community member felt the Parent Resource Centers were not that effective of a solution, because so few parents actually visit them. A teacher in the group found it insulting as a parent and educator that parents are “invited to be part of the process” in their children's education. As an educator, she felt that parents have even more of an impact on students than teachers, and DCPS needed to focus more of its efforts on reaching parents and holding them accountable for their responsibilities.

**Keywords:** facilities, data driven instruction, curriculum, literacy coaches, numeracy coaches, mentor teachers, Capital gains, student achievement, Comprehensive Staffing Model, Weighted Student Formula, Individual Graduation Plans, dropout rates, truancy, alternative schools, STARS, standards

**Presenter/ Moderator:** Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management  
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

## Codes

MR = Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

AS = Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management

SW = Shereen Williams, Content Person

CM = Community Member

## Notes:

**MR:** Welcomes and introduction to community forum.

**AS:** Overview of 5 year plan and 2009 Performance Plan for DCPS

=====Break Out into Groups=====

**SW:** Introduction to the group and welcoming to group.

**CM:** School staff are not helpful. Front office staff doesn't help with transcripts. The school is not a welcoming environment for students. The staff act as if they don't want kids there.

**CM:** The kids we are graduating and pushing through the school system are not equipped for next steps. We need to continue the focus on **data-driven instruction**.

**CM:** When the member taught for DCPS, tests didn't match **curriculum**. As a parent now, the connection seems better but not quite there. DCPS must think critically about meshing **curriculum** and tests. DCPS must train teachers on **math curriculum**. DCPS should get mentoring programs for teachers.

**SW:** We currently have **literacy and numeracy coaches** as well as **mentors teachers**.

**CM:** Member once saw comment on email from MR that said students "chose" to drop out. Parents are responsible for enrollment, not students. Doesn't like the phrase, "invite parents to be part of process." Parents are main teachers, and we should focus on them, not teachers. We should hold parents responsible.

**CM:** Parent has gone to school to register and been told she needs to come back next day. The staff once told parent to come back in January and was only allowed to register student after speaking with the principal. Front office staff needs to be more welcoming.

**CM:** Didn't see any **data** or information about improving **dropout** rates. It doesn't seem like data is being shared. The plans don't explicitly mentioning improving dropout rates and graduation.

On teacher recruitment and getting highly effective teachers: There also needs to be recruitment and an effort to make working in DCPS more attractive for local folks. Because DC is such a transient city, we need to find homegrown people.

**SW:** Sharing information in **Individual Graduation Plans**. We currently have people working on improving graduation rate and reducing **truancy**. Also creating **alternative schools** (Youth Engagement Academy, Twilight program at Ballou, etc.).

**CM:** Actually worked on transcript audit and saw **data** problems that were very eye-opening. *What are plans to improve data collection?*

**SW:** DCPS has finally upgraded **STARS** after many years of neglecting to do so.

**CM:** **Dropout/truancy** issues and related issues show the need to improve curriculum while making it more interesting. Teachers should not be receiving more scripted curriculum, but should be able to create **standards-based curriculum** in creative ways.

**SW:** DCPS wants teachers to ensure students learn **standards**, but can implement them in creative ways. We also have other programs (Embassy Adoption, etc.) to interest students.

**CM:** Extra programs are good, but worried teachers are only told to focus on reading and math and do not encourage student participation in these extra programs.

**CM:** DCPS should have an exit exams or something similar or have an exit test as benchmark for earning distinction on diploma.

**CM:** Echoing point about making sure teachers provide engaging environment, curriculum, and teach more than reading and math. The plan does not have enough information about how to make classrooms engaging.

**CM:** There are still problems with student records. Student went to summer school in Maryland and had scheduling difficulties this fall because one school wouldn't give information to another. There needs to be a better process for different systems to communicate.

**CM:** DCPS should have a letter of understanding to seniors. The letter should say what courses they have taken and what courses they need to graduate. In the past, there were parent/community training. Parents are not getting information. The communication breakdown between DCPS and its parents population is getting worse.

**CM:** There are no longer enough field trips anymore. DCPS buses no longer take students outside of DC. Students are not being exposed to other experiences.

**SW:** Comments/suggestions from others?

**CM:** The budget recently changed from **Weighted Student Formula** (?) to **Comprehensive Staffing Model**. *How does that work? How do you make resources equitable?*

**AS:** There are 4 areas critical for schools to function:

- 1) Administrative
- 2) Health/Wellness
- 3) Co-curricular (Art/Music/PE)
- 4) Academic coaches

The goal is to provide every school with a **Comprehensive Staffing Model** to address all of these four areas. The model started with receiving schools. This model is more prescriptive with staff budgeting. It ensures schools have a base of needed staff.

**CM:** *What does the teacher evaluation process linked to **student achievement** look like? How will teachers be evaluated in addition to test scores?*

**AS:** We have put in work to research and define what inputs connect most strongly with **student achievement** outputs. We want to align evaluation to the instructional framework we create from that. We will tweak the system this year and hopefully roll out for school year 2009-2010.

**CM:** DCPS systems/goals look similar to C2Education Center, which focuses on student achievement and college readiness. However C2 parents are much more motivated to bring their students. *How can DCPS find a way to motivate parents to do their part?*

**AS:** We are actually using incentives for middle schools (**Capital Gains**). Parents are clearly critical. We need to have a good program in EVERY school to motivate parents. Also we need to help parents understand what a good program and education looks like. I've talked to parents who say their school is great, but students at school are years below grade level. We can educate parents on what a good education looks like through the Parent & Family Resource Centers (PFRC) and spreading the message through teachers. We need to improve the connection between teachers and parents.

**CM:** DCPS used to have information packets to educate parents on expectations for schoolwork and homework. PFRCs are fine, but not enough parents utilize their programs; the PFRCs are not enough.

**CM:** There should be encyclopedias and dictionaries in classrooms to give students information. *Why is Phelps only for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and only for selected students?*

**MR:** We've found it to be most effective to build new schools one year at a time. This allows students to grow together, and for the school to establish a culture. We did this with McKinley as well and it worked very well. All 9<sup>th</sup> graders were allowed to apply.

**MR:** Closing and thanks for suggestions.